

Urban policy mobilities: Moving forward

Forthcoming

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

'Debates and Developments' Section

Pre-proof version

With contributions by:

Tom Baker, Simon Fraser University
Cristina Temenos, Northeastern University
Eugene McCann, Simon Fraser University
Kevin Ward, University of Manchester
Jennifer Robinson, University College London
Ian R. Cook, Northumbria University
Merje Kuus, University of British Columbia

Acknowledgements

This conversation came out of a panel session organized at the 2013 AAG in Los Angeles. Tom Baker and Cristina Temenos would like to thank the many contributors and attendants there, especially Jane M. Jacobs. Thanks also for the ongoing intellectual engagement of Gordon MacLeod, Nick Clarke and Pauline M^cGuirk, and to Lindsay Galbraith for comments on an earlier version of the concluding piece. Responsibility for the content belongs to the authors.

Urban policy mobilities: Moving forward

Abstract

An increasing number of scholars are focusing attention on the circulation of urban policies and the concept of 'policy mobilities'. Framed around a series of short commentaries, this collection identifies emerging areas of interest and contention for urban policy mobilities researchers. Exploring issues from conceptual dualisms and topological thinking, to interdisciplinarity and slow methodologies, the commentaries offer refinements and suggest new pathways for urban policy mobilities research into the future.

Urban policy mobilities research: A brief introduction

Tom Baker and Cristina Temenos

In a hotel function room, a large group gathers for a forum on urban renewal organised by the local Business Improvement Association. It is early 2013. The forum's draw-card is renowned urban designer Jan Gehl, who speaks to a collection of receptive politicians, city councillors, business owners and representatives, planners, architects, and members of the public. Gehl acquaints the audience with the diagnosis at the centre of his book *Cities for People* (Gehl, 2010). He explains that, by planning for cars not people, cities across the world are suffering. Gehl offers a tour through his work, beginning in Copenhagen, then on to Melbourne and Moscow. But judging by the audible gasps from the audience, his most dramatic achievement is in New York. A picture of Manhattan's Times Square is shown. It is choked with yellow taxis. Then a similar picture replaces it, but now Times Square teems with people. Deck chairs and tables are strewn across the former roadway. "If you can do it there," Gehl says of his work in New York, pausing with comedic patter, "you can do it anywhere."

In this scene, we offer the smallest of windows into contemporary urban policy-making. It did not take place in a Global City, nor the urban literature's paradigmatic heartlands, but in the regional Australian city of Newcastle, located on the country's east coast. We highlight this example not because it is unusual for a city like Newcastle to be engaging international expertise and drawing inspiration from cities as different as New York, Copenhagen, Melbourne and Moscow. Precisely the opposite: it has become so utterly common-place. Many of us have no doubt attended similar events, in similar rooms, and heard similar things. And although circulating experts and examples of best-practice can have seemingly little impact on local urban politics, their effects are very often profound.

Researchers have long been aware that urban politics and policy is never only local. Some time ago now, Hubbard and Hall (1998: 6) puzzled over the 'current ubiquity' of entrepreneurial urban policy. A decade before that, Harvey (1989: 10) remarked on 'serial reproduction' of certain policy forms brought on by intensifying inter-urban competition. More recently, however, a sustained body of critically-engaged research has emerged, focusing on the

circulation of urban policy models and knowledge. Attending to the relationships between policy-making, urban politics and globalization, much of this work engages the concept of 'policy mobilities' (McCann & Ward, 2011). While the contributions that follow look at new and diverse ways of 'doing' policy mobilities work, we take the opportunity in this introduction to briefly highlight the conceptual trajectories animating policy mobilities research so far.

Connected with various strands of critical policy research, policy mobilities accounts explore the processes, practices and resources brought together to construct, mobilize and territorialize policy knowledge. Stemming from a small number of early interventions (cf. Peck, 2002; Ward, 2006, 2007; McCann, 2008), and from a long tradition of policy transfer research within political science, urban policy mobilities research has grown substantially in the last five years. Concerned with topics including entrepreneurial governance, urban social movements, gentrification, policing, planning, and redevelopment, the urban policy mobilities literature accommodates a broad range of critical interventions into the social reproduction of cities. Because it straddles divergent epistemologies, from geography, planning, sociology and political science, urban policy mobilities research does not align with or represent a defined paradigm. While certain research agendas have emerged, they have by no means cut off other theoretical or empirical pathways. Simply put, there is no definitive approach.

While it is true, then, that policy mobilities research "resembles a rolling conversation rather than a coherent paradigm" (Peck, 2011: 774), there are discernable theoretical orientations present within the literature. We identify three. The first orientation uses examples of policy mobility to understand the production of cities through global-relational connections (see Cook, 2008; McCann & Ward, 2010; Ward, 2006). Noting the constitutive tensions between fixity and flow, territories and relations (Harvey, 1996; Massey, 2005), policy mobilities offer insight into the way urban territories emerge through 'parts of elsewhere' (Allen & Cochrane, 2007). While attending to the relational character of policy, this work emphasises the way mobile policies are 'placed' and derive their legitimacy from territorially-embedded narratives of policy success (Gonzalez, 2011).

The second orientation focuses on policy mobility as an entry-point into understanding hegemonic political-institutional settlements (see Clarke, 2012; Peck 2012; Theodore & Peck, 2012). This work builds on earlier investigations into neoliberal 'fast policy' regimes (Peck, 2002), which involve both the rapid circulation of neoliberal policy prescriptions through global policy networks and the establishment of rule regimes that circumscribe the scope of regulatory intervention to neoliberal imperatives. Here policy mobilities are examined for their role in consolidating, contesting and resisting the re-production of political-institutional settlements.

The third and final orientation uses policy mobilities to understand the operation of socio-material assemblages (Prince, 2010; McFarlane, 2011). Reflective of wider efforts to position the social in terms of dynamic more-than-human networks, this work considers how the formation of socio-material assemblages facilitates and inhibits the mobilisation of particular policies. Research in this vein pays particular attention to the role of materials (policy

documents, press releases, websites, manuals) and techniques (performance indicators, audit regimes), which shape the intentionality of policy actors and in turn the characteristics and outcomes of the policy process.

Collectively, this contribution to *Debates and Developments* casts its eye over the future of urban policy mobilities research. Highlighting emerging directions and areas of contention, it brings together four commentaries by researchers whose work deals with questions of globalization, policy-making and policy mobilities. The commentaries draw attention to a range of conceptual and methodological issues in need of consideration as the research field evolves in the years ahead. Rather than explore the nuances of a particular research agenda, or provide empirically focused research articles, we opt for a format designed to suggest and stimulate (for more comprehensive treatments, see Peck, 2011; Temenos & McCann, 2013).

To begin the series of commentaries, Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward reflect on the conceptual dualisms running through work on urban policy mobilities. Noting the risks of conceptual complacency accompanying the literature as it grows and matures, they explore how a critical disposition toward accepted dualisms, such as success/failure and presence/absence, remains important for refinement and innovation. Jennifer Robinson appraises another prominent tendency within urban policy mobilities research: a focus on movement. Questioning the emphasis on how certain policies 'arrive in' places, Robinson re-orientates attention toward the way places and actors 'arrive at' those policies. Instead of tracing the movement of certain policy forms as they touch down in particular local contexts, this approach foregrounds the messy local compilation of multiple circulating stories, techniques and policy concepts. Ian Cook then considers the potentials and pitfalls attending an interdisciplinary future for urban policy mobilities literature, made apparent in recent dialogues between geographers and political scientists. There is much to be gained from engagements across this disciplinary divide, not least an understanding of the varied theoretical and conceptual commitments motivating research on circulating policy forms. But in addition to strengthening *interdisciplinary* ties between putative 'camps' in geography and political science, Cook argues that policy mobilities research should make a concerted *multidisciplinary* effort by recognising existing and emerging ties involving a range of other disciplines, such as criminology and planning. In the final commentary, Merje Kuus offers insight into how this multidisciplinary future might proceed. Drawing on critical policy debates in international relations, sociology and anthropology, she argues that the fast nature of contemporary policy-making is most fully understood with a resolutely 'slow' approach. Advocating sustained, grounded inquiry, Kuus demonstrates how researchers, and society more broadly, stand to benefit from accounts capable of appreciating the social and institutional contexts in which policy-making occurs and, in turn, how authoritative policy ideas take shape and acquire their lustre. In the conclusion, we look back across the commentaries to suggest a number of considerations for future research. In gathering these various perspectives together, we hope they will stimulate conversations and thinking on the future of urban policy mobilities and critical policy research at large.

References

- Allen, J. and Cochrane, A. (2007) Beyond the territorial fix: regional assemblages, politics and power. *Regional Studies* 41.9, 1161-1175.
- Clarke, N. (2012) Urban policy mobility, anti-politics, and histories of the transnational municipal movement. *Progress in Human Geography* 36.1, 25-43.
- Cook, I. R. (2008) Mobilising urban policies: the policy transfer of US Business Improvement Districts to England and Wales. *Urban Studies* 45.4, 773-795.
- Gehl, J. (2010) *Cities for People*. Washington DC, Island Press.
- Gonzalez, S. (2011) Bilbao and Barcelona 'in motion'. How regeneration 'models' travel and mutate in the global flows of policy tourism. *Urban Studies* 48.7, 1397-1418.
- Harvey, D. (1989) From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71.1, 3-17.
- Harvey, D. (1996) *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Hubbard, P. and Hall, T. (1998) The entrepreneurial city and the 'new urban politics'. In T. Hall and P. Hubbard (Eds), *The entrepreneurial city: geographies of politics, regime and representation*, Sussex, John Wiley & Sons.
- Massey, D. (2005) *For space*. London, Sage.
- McCann, E. (2008) Expertise, truth, and urban policy mobilities: global circuits of knowledge in the development of Vancouver, Canada's 'four pillar' drug strategy. *Environment and Planning A* 40, 884-904.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (2010) Relationality/territoriality: toward a conceptualization of cities in the world. *Geoforum* 41.2, 175-184.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (Eds) (2011) *Mobile urbanism: cities and policymaking in the global age*. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press.
- McFarlane, C. (2011) *Learning the city: knowledge and translocal assemblage*. Malden, Blackwell.
- Peck, J. (2002) Political economics of scale: fast policy, interscalar relations, neoliberal workfare. *Economic Geography* 78.3, 331-360.
- Peck, J. (2011) Geographies of policy: from transfer-diffusion to mobility-mutation. *Progress in Human Geography* 35.6, 773-797.
- Peck, J. (2012) Recreative city: Amsterdam, vehicular ideas and the adaptive spaces of creativity policy. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36.3, 462-485.
- Prince, R. (2010) Policy transfer as policy assemblage: making policy for the creative industries in New Zealand. *Environment and Planning A* 42.1, 169-186.
- Temenos, C. and McCann, E. (2013) Geographies of policy mobilities. *Geography Compass* 7.5, 344-357.

- Theodore, N. and Peck, J. (2012) Framing neoliberal urbanism: translating 'commonsense' urban policy across the OECD zone. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 19, 20-41.
- Ward, K. (2006) 'Policies in motion', urban management and state restructuring: the trans-local expansion of Business Improvement Districts. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30.1, 54-75.
- Ward, K. (2007) Business Improvement Districts: policy origins, mobile policies and urban liveability. *Geography Compass* 1.3, 657-672.

Thinking through dualisms in urban policy mobilities

Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward

Recently, 'urban policy mobilities' has emerged as a term that refers to a series of new approaches to studying urban policy-making (McCann & Ward 2011, 2013). Researchers have focused on the simultaneous making and moving of policy to develop an analysis that is both global and local, while always being close to practice. In doing so, they have produced studies of a number of areas of policy-making – e.g. creativity (Prince, 2010), public health (McCann, 2008), economic development (Ward, 2006), financing (Ward, 2012), sustainability planning (Temenos & McCann, 2012), transport (Wood, 2013), and welfare (Peck & Theodore, 2010). These studies have common foci, including attention to the role of benchmarking, comparison, consultants, and think tanks in urban policy-making.

Yet, neither these foci nor how they are conceptualized have become 'canon' – they still warrant reflection, critique, and extension (e.g., see Clarke, 2011; Cresswell, 2011; Jacobs, 2012; Prince, 2012).¹ The literature remains internally heterogeneous and for its future advancement it is important that those developing it – including us – reflect upon and question its still-emerging characteristics. Therefore, we want to address and deconstruct certain dualisms – clean and neat divisions of things into opposing categories, described as A/not-A by Rose (1993) – that appear to characterize much of the urban policy mobilities work. We argue that, on reflection, these 'assumed contrasts either break down or involve more complex relationships than is commonly realized' (Sayer, 1991: 283). Rather than be rejected out of hand, we argue that dualisms should be critically reflected upon and examined in terms of relationality. Sayer (1991) provides an excellent discussion of the implications of dualistic thinking for geographical analyses and ties thinking in our discipline to wider, longstanding currents of scholarship on binaries and dialectics.

The first dualism running through the urban policy mobilities field is that of success/failure. The study of how and why certain policies get mobilized and become best practice models for policy-makers elsewhere is the study of 'successes' – at least as defined within dominant policy-making circles (for

¹ Thanks to Sophie McCann for pointing out this usage of 'canon.'

different critiques of 'successism' in this context, see Wolman, 1992; Jacobs, 2012). So, for example, the dualistic separation between, say, Barcelona as a 'success' of post-industrial regeneration and Detroit as a 'failure' is, fundamentally, the study of ideology and power in the politics of policy-making. Whether this focus on the construction and labeling of 'successes' (and its material effects) can be characterized as coming *at the expense* of the study of failures or, as Williams and Pendras (2013) have pointed out, a middle ground of 'stasis' or slow change, is worthy of further discussion, however. Neither success nor failure is absolute. One does not make sense without the other. Rather, success and failure are relationally constituted in politics and in policy-making. Studies of urban policy mobilities should, then, reflect critically on approaches to success/failure and their relational constitution even as they simultaneously study the effects of their empirical separation and reification in policy-making.

A second, related, dualism is that of presence/absence, in which the presence of policies in some locations is contrasted with their absence elsewhere. By its very nature, urban policy mobilities scholarship tends to focus on presences over absences: the presence of a policy in a particular location, its movement in and through others, its simultaneous, if modified, presence in multiple locations, the implications for those places and for the content, form and shape of the policy itself. Certainly, this approach can be read as constructing presence *against* absence – ignoring places from which best practice policy models do not emerge and in which they do not seem to be 'successfully' introduced. This would seem to be wrongheaded because it obscures the interests and power present in the construction of presence and absence. Our argument is that there is scope to think critically about the ways in which presence and absence are not absolute or necessarily opposed but, rather exist in relation to each other. Therefore, it might be worthwhile to *think through the absences that exist within the presences we study*. In a recent contribution, for example, Prince (2012) argues that the metaphors used in the policy mobilities discussion must be critically evaluated and that a metaphor of spatial fluidity can help overcome the reifying tendency of some of our dualisms.

Thinking through the presence/absence dualism has at least two consequences for studies. First, focusing on relationality leads us to take seriously the role that *absent presences* play in the construction of policy. When policies are being discussed in a particular place, references to examples of similar policies elsewhere abound, as does the influence of 'outside' consultants and think tanks. It is sometimes the absence of growth, for example, that encourages attempts to embed a new policy model in place. The introduction of Business Improvement Districts into England from Canada via the US was, in part, due to the absence of an existing model of generating revenues from businesses. Pursuing this reasoning would generate various other sorts of influential 'absences,' including national states and international agencies. A second consequence is political. Absence is fundamental to policy mobilization because it legitimizes attempts to change and embed new policy models. Absence of success in an extant policy model, or the absence of knowledge about how to address a particular governance problem is the sorts

of present absences that are central to the politics of policy-making. Indeed, they are the basis for what Nick Clarke (2012) calls, 'actually existing comparative urbanism' in which urban elites compare their cities to others. *Constructed, relationally-produced* absence is very much about power and, therefore, we suggest that studies of urban policy mobilities should approach absence and presence not as dichotomous – one here and one over there – but rather as intertwined, mutually constituting, reinforcing, and political.

A third dualism is that of mobilities/immobilities. Much of the work in the urban policy mobilities approaches has, almost by definition, emphasized those policies that appear to be "mobile," where there is evidence of the policy being moved from location to another and/or where the policy appears in multiple and inter-connected locations. In some cases, reference is made to a whole policy moving, in others to aspects or features of a policy, such as its institutional arrangement, name, objectives or underlying philosophy. The 'other,' so to speak, in the literature is those policies that do not appear to have travelled, policies that appear to exist in just one location, for example. Here mobility and immobility are understood as absolutes. Yet, mobility and immobility are frequently mutually constitutive. For, even within the most 'mobile' of policies there are elements of immobility, not least the institutional and physical infrastructures through which they travel and are conditioned (Temenos & McCann, 2013). Furthermore, since policies do not move fully formed from place to place, some parts move while others prove less mobile and remain fixed in place. For example, when Business Improvement Districts were introduced into the UK from the US, their bottom-up emphasis, an element associated with the character of the American state, was left immobile and replaced in Britain by what might be called 'centrally-prescribed localism,' reflecting the centralized nature of the UK state (Ward, 2006). In at least these two ways, mobilities and immobilities are intertwined.

In this very short intervention we argue for the acknowledgement of the dualisms present in urban policy mobilities research. Yet, we do not necessarily suggest that they must be banished from the field *a priori*. The creation of value-laden dualisms is a fundamental aspect of social hegemony and must be an empirical object of study we would contend. More pertinently, analytical dualisms must be thought through critically. We suggest that, in the cases we have outlined, it is important to acknowledge the utility of thinking about relational dyads, rather than oppositional dualisms (Sayer, 1991). This means understanding their elements, not as dichotomous but as intertwined, mutually constituting and reinforcing. To do otherwise would be to fail to learn from previous waves of socio-spatial thinking in which dualisms have been a reoccurring feature (Murdoch 1997).

References

- Clarke, N. (2012) Urban policy mobility, anti-politics, and histories of the transnational municipal movement. *Progress in Human Geography* 35.4, 1-19.
- Cresswell, T. (2011) Mobilities II: still. *Progress in Human Geography* 35.4, 550-558.

- Jacobs, J.M. (2012) Urban geographies I: still thinking cities relationally. *Progress in Human Geography* 36.3, 412–422.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (Eds.) (2011) *Mobile urbanism: cities and policy-making in a global age*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (2013) A multi-disciplinary approach to policy transfer research: geographies, assemblages, mobilities, and mutations. *Policy Studies* 34.1, 2-18.
- Murdoch, J. (1997) Towards a geography of heterogeneous associations. *Progress in Human Geography* 21.8, 321-337.
- Prince, R. (2010) Policy transfer as policy assemblage: making policy for the creative industries in New Zealand. *Environment and Planning A* 42.1, 169-186.
- Prince, R. (2012) Metaphors of policy mobility: fluid spaces of “creativity” policy. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 94.4, 317-331.
- McCann, E. (2008) Expertise, truth, and urban policy mobilities: global circuits of knowledge in the development of Vancouver, Canada’s ‘Four Pillar’ drug strategy. *Environment and Planning A* 40.4, 885-904.
- Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2010) Recombinant workfare across the Americas: transnationalizing “fast” social policy. *Geoforum* 41.2, 195-208.
- Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and geography: the limits to geographical knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sayer, A. (1991) Behind the locality debate: deconstructing geography’s dualisms. *Environment and Planning A* 23.2, 283-308.
- Temenos, C. and McCann, E. (2013) Policies. In Adey, P., Bissell, D., Hannam, K., Merriman, P. and Sheller, M. (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*. Routledge. 575-584.
- Temenos, C. and McCann, E. (2012) The local politics of policy mobility: learning, persuasion, and the production of a municipal sustainability fix. *Environment & Planning A* 44.6, 1389-1406.
- Ward, K. (2006) “Policies in motion”, urban management and state restructuring: the trans-local expansion of business improvement districts. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30.1, 54-75.
- Ward, K. (2012) Policies in motion, the politics of elsewhere and the current urban condition. Paper presented at the Association of American Geographers Annual Conference, February, New York.
- Williams, C. and Pendras, M. (2013) Urban stasis and politics of alternative development in the United States. *Urban Geography* 34.3, 289-304.
- Wolman, H. (1992). Understanding cross-national policy transfers: the case of Britain and the U.S. *Governance* 5.1, 27–45.
- Wood, A. (2013). *Peripatetic planning: Tracing the mobility of bus rapid transit through South African cities*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Geography, University College London, London.

“Arriving at” urban policies: The topological spaces of urban policy mobility

Jennifer Robinson

Rather than tracing how policies arrive in different contexts, and are made local, this contribution suggests an inversion of perspective, to consider how cities “arrive at” policies in the context of a globalised world of urban policy circulations. Thus I propose to move beyond a focus on what is moving (tracing the trajectories of a policy document, an idea, a policy consultant), and rather to look at how policy makers compose their ideas in the midst of a myriad influences from elsewhere.

While the intrinsic spatiality of policy mobility is self-evident; the extent to which conventional spatial vocabularies are helpful for understanding the specific dynamics of urban policy circulations is less clear. Earlier analyses of policy “transfers” focus on territories from which policies flow, the routes or trajectories which they follow, and places which are shaped then by the insights and experiences of other places (Stone, 2004; Peck & Theodore, 2001; Ward, 2006). More recently, McCann (2011) has emphasised the embodied, performative and material nature of the process whereby ideas are put into motion, and the settings which facilitate ideas being taken up in new places. Such careful theorization of the trajectories and tracks of urban policy certainly helps to capture the specificity of the movements of ideas, people and things which make up policies in different places; it focuses on explaining how policies arrive in new places and are transformed in the process, and emphasises the relational nature of urban politics (Cochrane, 2011).

However, it is apparent in writing about urban policy mobilities that scholars struggle to express the complexity associated with the proliferation, speed and extensive transformations wrought by and to policies in motion. Peck and Theodore express this well:

“The spatiality of policymaking is not flattened into some almost-featureless and inert plane or transaction space, marked only with jurisdictional boundaries, across which transfers occur, but in terms of *a three-dimensional mosaic of increasingly reflexive forms of governance, shaped by multi-directional forms of crossscalar and interlocal policy mobility.*” (Peck & Theodore, 2010: 170; italics are mine).

Thus, policies not only circulate; they are also “made up” locally (McCann & Ward, 2010) and across multiple scales and arenas of governance. But as we turn to try to understand this, many of our analytical metaphors seem to lack purchase. We can search for the entanglement of a range of different agendas in one context and consider how they shape one another, or explore the making local of specific policy ideas which can be traced from one context to another (Peck & Theodore, 2012). But we also quickly need to account for more ephemeral spaces of interaction and communication (Simone, 2001; Saunier, 2002): influence and inspiration, half-forgotten meetings, fleeting

encounters, rumours, and long buried memories of policy terminology. Here topological spatialities, concerned less with tracing physical mobilities and connections and more with exploring the spatialities of presencing and proximity, accounting for the interminglings of interiority and exteriority, or exploring how institutions and agents might secure influence at a distance, are, I would suggest, crucial if we are to be able to investigate many of the spatial dynamics operative in determining policy outcomes (Allen, 2008, 2009). Considering how “parts of elsewhere” make up local places (Allen & Cochrane, 2007: 1171) has the potential to stretch our analytical capabilities and vocabularies.

The question which arises, then, is, how are urban policies “arrived at” in the midst of here and elsewhere? The experiences of policy makers involved in the development of various versions of Johannesburg’s long term city strategy between 1999 and 2011 (see Robinson (2011, 2013) for a fuller treatment), are instructive.

One of the key architects of Johannesburg’s 2006 Growth and Development Strategy explains how policy ideas came together for him in this process:

The way the stuff works in truth is that a small team of people and almost always, one or two individuals within that team are engaged in policy debates more generally, read incredibly widely on all sorts of issues and **it just becomes part of the amorphous mass of their thinking** ... but if you were to say now where did that idea come from, you’d say well it came out of the work we were doing in this particular department but in truth actually the idea probably came from somewhere else (former city policy writer, Johannesburg, July 2009).

In this view, the policy and analytical ideas which are “in motion” within a trajectories perspective are already there. They didn’t “arrive”. Policy makers in Johannesburg have already made their own many of the different available ways of thinking about and intervening in cities. These might have been learnt from academic or policy literatures, but they are often seen as already profoundly local.

Concepts might be borrowed at one moment, only to be thought of later as newly invented locally. Or policy ideas which arrive from somewhere else might also be the result of long and politically tough policy processes, as with the collaborative format of city-wide strategic planning in Johannesburg which was hard-won over decades of anti-apartheid struggle only to arrive again fully formed from the Cities Alliance. Policy ideas might have wider circulations and histories, but the relevant histories and processes by which they come to policy makers’ attention might be entirely localised. For example, urban sprawl is a common feature of many twentieth century modernising cities, but in Johannesburg it is also a specific apartheid inheritance and addressing its consequences for the urban form is has a distinctive political charge. Or, indeed, policy ideas might be self-consciously reimported as new from a different context to reinvigorate policy options which have been displaced locally. This is arguably the case with the idea of in-situ upgrading in

Johannesburg, initially very important in late- and post-apartheid urban planning, and then brought “back” from Brazil as the contradictions of post-apartheid’s formal housing developments became apparent in the late 2000s.

In one optic, then, I would suggest that in many cases Johannesburg itself – the policy makers and analysts, residents and politicians – already owns the available international urban and policy literature and ideas informing its policies: they are already local. In another, policy makers, politicians and residents often “invent” policy ideas which are very widely known, or which might emerge in different places at the same time. In this context, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to track the topographical provenance of ideas – and in my view this may not be the most interesting dynamic to explore, either politically or in terms of understanding the spatialities of cities in globalisation.

There are many moments, then, in which the trajectories of policy ideas cannot easily be known – and when for policy makers an array of complex local and learned ideas come together to enable them to respond to specific challenges. As one policy maker noted, “*you know with ideas you often don’t have any idea of where they come from, you know they just creep in*, like new words and terminologies you know like you don’t say as of this day I’m adopting this concept... but you hear it one day etc. and then you realise you’ve adopted it” (Senior city official, Johannesburg, September 2011; my italics). This might reflect the problematic nature of some aspects of circulating policy – as “super-fast” policy, perhaps, taken up so easily its origins are already forgotten! And it certainly highlights the possibility of incapacitating local policy expertise through the prolific circulation of good practice examples and policy ideas by relatively powerful agents. On the other hand, the Johannesburg policy makers I interviewed work very hard indeed to rework ideas and to consciously build distinctive approaches to their context out of the array of resources available, even despite the strong efforts by powerful organisations to promote certain approaches within international policy circuits. This not only puts pressure on policy makers to get to grips with new ideas, but might also work to limit local agency. As another policy maker observed in relation to the concept of resilience:

“honestly its been really difficult, very very challenging ... it would have been easy if we’d had agreement around the concept and theories of change (concept of resilience) but at the same time ... I guess the challenge has been trying to bring together the political imperatives, national and provincial priorities and then this theory stuff together” (City official, Johannesburg, September 2011)

Certainly, then, there is evidence that multiple, often untraceable, influences are brought to bear on even powerful circulating ideas in order to “arrive at” distinctive responses to the specific challenges of a particular city.

Based on these examples, my sense is that the process of making policies local – and of making up local policies (Ward, 2006) – needs to be understood through both topographical and topological spatial imaginations. Arriving at policies involves far more than assembling discrete materialised entities, ideas or objects which we can trace as they move from there to here.

Complex, topological spatial imaginations are needed to interpret the mixing and folding of here and “multiple elsewheres” (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004) into distinctive local policies.

References

- Allen, J. (2003) *Lost geographies of power*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Allen, J. (2008) Powerful geographies: spatial shifts in the architecture of globalization. In S. Clegg and M. Haugaard (Eds.) *Handbook of Power*.
- Allen, J. (2009) Three spaces of power: territory, networks, plus a topological twist in the tale of domination and authority. *Journal of Power* 2.2, 197-212.
- Allen, J. and Cochrane, A. (2007) Beyond the territorial fix: regional assemblages, politics and power. *Regional Studies* 41.9, 1161-1175.
- City of Johannesburg (2006) Growth and Development Strategy [WWW document]. URL <http://www.joburg.org.za/2006/may/budget.stm#growth> (Accessed 9 October 2006).
- City of Johannesburg (2011) GDS2040 [WWW document]. URL http://www.joburg.org.za/gds2040/gds2040_strategy.php (Accessed 24 February 2012).
- Cochrane, A. (2011) Making up global urban policies. In Bridge, G. and Watson, S. (Eds.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*. Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 738-746.
- McCann, E. (2011) Urban policy mobilities and global circuits of knowledge: toward a research agenda. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101.1, 107-130.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (2010) Relationality/territoriality: toward a conceptualization of cities in the world. *Geoforum* 41, 175-184.
- Mbembe, A. and Nuttall, S. (2004) Writing the world from an African metropolis. *Public Culture* 16.3, 347-72.
- Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2001) Exporting workfare/importing welfare-to-work: exploring the politics of Third Way policy transfer. *Political Geography* 20 .4, 427-460.
- Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2010) Mobilizing policy: models, methods, and mutations. *Geoforum* 41, 169-174.
- Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2012) Follow the policy: a distended case approach. *Environment and Planning A* 44, 21-30.
- Robinson, J. (2011) The spaces of circulating knowledge: city strategies and global urban governmentality. In E. McCann and K. Ward (Eds.) *Mobile Urbanism: cities and policymaking in the global age*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Robinson, J. (2013) “Arriving at” urban policies/the urban: traces of elsewhere in making city futures. In O. Söderström *et al.* (Eds.), *Critical Mobilities*, Lausanne and London: EPFL and Routledge.
- Saunier, P-Y. (2002) Taking up the bet on connections: a municipal contribution. *Contemporary European History* 11.4, 507-527.

- Simone, A. (2001) Straddling the divides: remaking associational life in the informal African city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25.1, 102-117.
- Stone, D. (2004) Transfer agents and global networks in the 'transnationalisation' of policy'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, 545-566.
- Ward, K. (2006) 'Policies in motion', urban management and state restructuring: the trans-local expansion of Business Improvement Districts. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30.1, 54-75.
- Ward, K. (2009) Towards a relational comparative approach to the study of cities. *Progress in Human Geography*, 1-17.

Policy mobilities and interdisciplinary engagement

Ian R. Cook

As Baker and Temenos highlight in the introduction to this *Debates and Developments* section, there has been a steady growth in recent years of 'policy mobilities' accounts that explore the movement of policies between places. These accounts are often associated with human geography in that they usually emphasize the geographies of policy mobilities with many, but certainly not all, of the authors being geographers (see, for instance, Peck & Theodore, 2010; Cook & Ward, 2011; McCann, 2011; McCann & Ward, 2011; Temenos & McCann, 2013; Prince, 2013). Despite the prominence of geographies and geographers within policy mobilities research it is useful to cast a critical eye on the antecedents and alternatives to policy mobilities beyond geography as well as the connections and disagreements across disciplines on the topic. Furthermore, it is important to ponder whether a more interdisciplinary future for policy mobilities studies is desirable.

Like much research in the geographical tradition, policy mobilities accounts tend to borrow, adapt and fuse ideas from different parts of the social sciences, often beyond geography. In addition to a steadily growing interest in anthropological studies of policy worlds (e.g. Shore *et al.*, 2011), policy mobilities scholars have tended to concentrate on two key bodies of literature whose origins lie outside of geography. The first being the sociological literature on mobilities with its qualitative focus on what happens *on the move* (e.g. Urry, 2007) and the second being the political science-dominated literature on policy transfer (e.g. Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Stone, 2004; Benson & Jordan, 2011). The interest in the latter reflects a desire not to 'miss the boat' on (political science-led) discussions of an inherently geographical process (cf. Dicken, 2003 on geographers in globalisation debates). Yet its engagement with the policy transfer literature is often critical in tone, reflecting a sense of unease with its conceptual tools (see, for instance, McCann, 2011; Peck, 2011).

In the context of the rapid expansion of policy mobilities accounts as well as (until recently) a somewhat eerie silence from political scientists on the

merits or otherwise of policy mobilities accounts, the inclusion of geographers in two recent special issues on policy transfer in *Political Studies Review* and *Policy Studies* (traditionally political science journals) is noteworthy. In both, Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward (2012, 2013) outline the problems with the political science-led policy transfer literature before overviewing a geographical approach to policy mobilities. Here they accuse the policy transfer literature of (a) tending to focus too much on agents (rather than agency); (b) often concentrating too much on policy transfers at the national scale and not enough at other scales and their interconnections; (c) focusing too little on the ways policies mutate as they move; and (d) often inappropriately framing policy transfer as a rational choice exercise. Policy mobilities accounts that take a more social constructivist bent, they counter, tend not to make these mistakes.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, McCann and Ward's arguments receive staunch criticism from some of their fellow contributors to the special issues. They are reproached for overlooking (more recent) political science studies of policy transfer that examine levels above and below the nation state and those studies that show how policies change form as they are transferred (cf. Benson & Jordan 2012; Dolowitz & Marsh 2012; Marsh & Evans, 2012a, 2012b). In short, they are accused of constructing a "straw man" of political science studies of policy transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh 2012: 343; Marsh & Evans, 2012a: 480, 2012b: 591). Yet in spite of these criticisms, accusations and disagreements, the various contributors of the two special issues agree that further *interdisciplinary* engagement on the topic is highly important.

What should we make of this desire for future interdisciplinary engagements amid such stormy waters? On the one hand, it is easy to be sceptical. Hollow academic talk of interdisciplinarity – which Jacobs and Frickel (2009: 44) usefully define as "communication and collaboration across academic disciplines" – is certainly not new. It is also true that contrasting ontological and epistemological differences such as the tensions between the more social constructivist bent of policy mobilities scholars and the more positivist bent of policy transfer scholars can create barriers to deeper forms of interdisciplinarity. In addition, there is a danger of viewing interdisciplinarity as an end in itself or a golden ticket to an empirical and theoretical utopia (Moran, 2006).

On the other hand, and despite these potential pitfalls, I believe that engagement beyond disciplines can be highly productive especially in this case when we are all talking about the same issue. Interdisciplinarity would require a certain spirit of openness and engagement that would be respectful and inclusive, as well as provoking and innovative. Disagreements will, of course, happen. Interdisciplinarity would also involve practical ways of working together and communicating across disciplinary borders. This could include setting up interdisciplinary conferences on the topic, edited collections, research collaborations as well as more mundane and everyday practices such as scholars keeping up with the on-going research and debates across the disciplines (rather than occasional glances, summaries and criticisms of the usual polemical articles in the 'rival' camps).

Most importantly of all, interdisciplinary connections need to be more *multidisciplinary* in the sense of engaging with scholars in other social science

disciplines beyond political science and geography on these issues. This, of course, is beginning to happen. Take, for instance, a recent symposium in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (Vol. 37, Issue 5). The articles in it by scholars from a variety of disciplines explore the internationalization of planning and architectural ideas and the international movement of planners and architects. In so doing, they point to earlier literature on the topic by planners (e.g. Almandoz, 1999; Healey & Upton, 2010; Ward, 2010) that is often ignored in the policy mobilities and policy transfer literature. Both the earlier studies and special issue are empirically rich and often conceptually nuanced (e.g. Healey, 2013) as is subsequent work on the topic by planners (e.g. Lieto, 2013). As part of this, the insights of the policy mobilities literature are explicitly drawn on and developed in some of this work on the internationalization of planning ideas and models (e.g. Harris & Moore, 2013; Cook *et al.*, 2014). With this mind, engaging with these studies and scholars in planning and cognate disciplines is important, as is engagement with other social science disciplines where interest in policy transfer has faded (such as criminology) and interest is limited (such as sociology). Here we can ask scholars in these disciplines why there is limited or fading interest; what – if anything – are studies of policy transfer and policy mobilities doing wrong; and what conceptual, empirical and methodological insights can these disciplines offer to the study of the movement of policies between places.

There is much to be researched and discussed on policy mobilities – such as the evolving technologies used in circulating policy ideas; the tensions between places competing with each other but also cooperating through knowledge exchange; the relationship between policy mobilities and austerity politics; and the circulation of policy ideas on punishment (e.g. prisons, restorative justice, community service, capital punishment). All of these are, for me, important areas for social scientists of different stripes to investigate. Yet rather than taking the above as a finalised, set in stone research agenda, I suggest that we use this short list as a starting point for an interdisciplinary conversation on the future agenda for policy mobilities and policy transfer research. Let's talk more about what should we do next and how can we work individually and collectively to explore and understand this.

References

- Almandoz, A. (1999) Transfer of ideas: the emergence of Venezuelan urbanism in the proposals for 1930s' Caracas. *International Planning Studies* 4.1, 79-94.
- Benson, D. and Jordan, A. (2011) What have we learned from policy transfer research? Dolowitz and Marsh revisited. *Political Studies Review* 9.3, 366-378.
- Benson, D. and Jordan, A. (2012) Policy transfer research: still evolving, not yet through? *Political Studies Review* 10.3, 333-338.
- Cook I. R. and Ward, K. (2011) Trans-urban networks of learning, mega-events and policy tourism: the case of Manchester's Olympic and Commonwealth Games projects. *Urban Studies* 48.12, 2519-2535.

- Cook, I. R., Ward, S. V. and Ward, K. (2014) A Springtime journey to the Soviet Union: post-war planning and policy mobilities through the Iron Curtain. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, early online.
- Dicken, P. (2003) Geographers and 'globalization': (yet) another missed boat? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29.1, 5-26.
- Dolowitz, D. and Marsh, D. (2000) Learning from abroad: the role of policy transfer in contemporary policy-making. *Governance* 13.1, 5-24.
- Dolowitz, D. and Marsh, D. (2012) The future of policy transfer research. *Political Studies Review* 10.3, 339-345.
- Harris, A. and Moore, S. (2013) Planning histories and practices of circulating urban knowledge. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.5, 1499-1509.
- Healey, P. (2013) Circuits of knowledge and techniques: the transnational flow of planning ideas and practices. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.5, 1510-1526.
- Healey, P. and Upton, R. (2010) (Eds.) *Crossing borders: international exchange and planning practices*. Routledge, London.
- Jacobs, J. A. and Frickel, S. (2009) Interdisciplinarity: a critical assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35.1, 43-65.
- Jones, T. and Newburn, T. (2007) *Policy transfer and criminal justice: exploring US influence over British crime control policy*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Lieto, L. (2013) Cross-border mythologies: the problem with travelling planning ideas. *Planning Theory*, early online.
- Marsh, D. and Evans, M. (2012a) Policy transfer: coming of age and learning from experience. *Policy Studies* 33.6, 477-481.
- Marsh, D. and Evans, M. (2012b) Policy transfer: into the future, learning from the past. *Policy Studies* 33.6, 587-591.
- McCann, E. J. (2011) Urban policy mobilities and global circuits of knowledge: toward a research agenda. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101.1, 107-130.
- McCann, E. J. and Ward, K. (2011) (Eds.) *Mobile urbanism: cities and policy-making in the global age*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (2012) Policy assemblages, mobilities and mutations: toward a multidisciplinary conversation. *Political Studies Review* 10.3, 325-332.
- McCann, E. and Ward, K. (2013) A multi-disciplinary approach to policy transfer research: geographies, assemblages, mobilities and mutations. *Policy Studies* 34.1, 2-18.
- Moran, M. (2006) Interdisciplinarity and political science. *Politics* 26.2, 73-83.
- Peck, J. (2011) Geographies of policy: from transfer-diffusion to mobility-mutation. *Progress in Human Geography* 35.6, 773-797.
- Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2010) Mobilizing policy: models, methods, and mutations. *Geoforum* 41.2, 169-174.
- Prince, R. (2013) Metaphors of policy mobilities: fluid spaces of "creativity" policy. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 94.4, 317-331.

- Rose, G. (1997) Situated knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography* 21.3, 305-320.
- Shore, C., Wright, S. and Però, D. (2011) (eds.) *Policy worlds: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power*. New York: Berghahn.
- Stone, D. (2004) Transfer agents and global networks in the 'transnationalization' of policy. *Journal of European Public Policy* 11.3, 545-566.
- Temenos, C. and McCann, E. (2013) Geographies of policy mobilities. *Geography Compass* 7.5, 344-357.
- Urry, J. (2007) *Mobilities*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Ward, S. V. (2010) What did the Germans ever do for us? A century of British learning about and imagining modern planning. *Planning Perspectives* 25.2, 117-40.

For slow research

Merje Kuus

The world of policy-making is fast. Information moves rapidly, deadlines are short, texts are drafted quickly. Policy professionals nimbly adapt their proposals to political circumstances. The academics who study these settings often try to keep up with that pace. They are well-versed in the terminology of policy-making, they know the interests of the institutions they study, and they tailor their work to the needs of these institutions. Against this background, my intervention argues for slow research: a scholarship that analyzes policy in its ambiguous social context and insists on asking the scholar's own questions about it. I argue that such work is *necessarily* slower than the 'normal' rate of academic productivity today.

Policy mobilities work recognizes the dangers of fast research and analyses the methods and concepts that can help us avoid them. There is substantial effort to reveal the trans-local dynamics of transnational policy processes without losing sight of the place-specific dynamics of these processes (McCann & Ward, 2012; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Roy, 2012). My argument does not revisit these conceptual and methodological discussions per se; I rather add a logistical endnote about research practice to these discussions. A challenge today is not only to discern what method or concept best suits a particular study but also to resist the pressure to make that study fast. There are many debates on how research ought to be done; relatively little has been said on the logistical pressures under which policy research is actually done. And yet if a study of policy is analytically thin, the problem is often less about the conceptual vocabulary and more about such prosaic production pressures. In the spirit that criticism must include self-criticism, I remind us about those pressures and I foreground some ways in which they can be resisted.

The reflection engages with the policy mobilities research, situated mostly in economic and urban geography, from a slightly different vantage point—political geography and related work in international relations, sociology,

and anthropology. It draws on my seven years of work on the production of geopolitical knowledge claims in European Union diplomatic settings (Kuus, 2014). Space constraints do not allow me to bring empirical examples from the work; I rather use the experience to make two points on why we need contextual nuance and what methodological challenges this entails. To do so is not to advocate the naïve idea of an academic innocently detached from the processes she studies. The point is analytical and practical: slow research is better research—meaning a more insightful analysis of the settings studied.

Moving with the speed of policy-making can easily lead to over-privileging theory over empirical material, grand (seemingly) universal patterns over small contingent ones. Model- and theory-building comes to overshadow social context. However, as Pierre Bourdieu (1996: 180) reminds us, the task for an in-depth study of a social object, such as policy, is not to examine the object as such but to investigate the social space from which that object derives its distinctive, differential, and relational properties. We must avoid the illusion of contingency that privileges events over processes (ibid.: 188). That illusion creates accounts that review the new stuff, which always abounds in the world of policy, while leaving the broader social field of its production out of focus. Context, Andrew Sayer (1992: 248) says, is not a background. Rather, the structuring of the context and the power relationships at work in it are central to explanation. Where relations between things are contingent, “their form must always be an empirical question, that is one which must be answered observing actual cases” (ibid.: 143).

The challenge of context-intensive work is especially acute when studying mobile policies. The need to consider multiple places intensifies the difficulties of juggling limited resources while increasing the pressures to forge products from these resources. Comparative empirical work is necessarily slow: it cannot start with policy texts but must look at the broader social milieu in which these texts are produced. Careful contextualization is important not only to answer questions better but also to ask better questions. It improves not only in the final write-up but also, and more fundamentally, the original set-up of a study. Pressures to simplify context by including less circumstantial detail or spending less ‘idle’ time on the field (i.e. time not engaged in a measurable activity like interviewing) can produce a study that appears more generalizable and seemingly closer to the settings studied (more interviews). Analytical depth is too often the collateral damage of simplification. The trade-off may not be evident at first look; it comes into view in the empirical analysis.

A common response to these problems, which are recognized in theory if not always addressed in practice, is to attempt an ethnographic enquiry: one that seeks to get close to policy-makers through extended presence inside the institutions studied. In many policy-making settings, however, access is limited by design (Kuus, 2013). Getting close can fuel empiricism in which the researcher focuses on people’s perceptions of the social and neglects to ask how these perceptions are produced (Shore, 2006: 48). The search for the right toolbox is itself a problem because it implies that a right technical tool—such as months of fieldwork inside a policy apparatus—solves problems. It does not. In order to understand a field—a social space that situates its agents—one must identify the forms of capital required in it, but to grasp these

forms of capital one must comprehend the logic of the field in question. Methodologically, this requires a constant back-and-forth between structural conditions and individual tactics. This to-and-fro is a fundamentally empirical task, which cannot be done outside a specific social context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 108). The work is necessarily slow and the findings necessarily ambiguous, but they enable the researcher to bring structure and agency into simultaneous view. To emphasize ambiguity is not to condone relativism or shy away from analysis. 'To interpret an event as ambiguous or as having multiple meanings', Sayer (1992: 222) writes, 'is not to admit just any interpretation for not all interpretations would recognize the ambiguity. Ironically, if we are to do justice to ambiguity we cannot interpret it in just any way.' Interpreting the necessary ambiguity of social processes is a time-consuming effort that cannot rely on a ready-made conceptual or methodological toolbox.

This reflection neither praises nor critiques any particular body of research. It speaks to the policy mobilities work by highlighting a practical challenge that faces that field as well as critical policy studies more generally. Bureaucratic structures in city halls, foreign ministries, and universities alike want answers yesterday. More specifically, they want answer-like products yesterday. Following the model of big science, universities increasingly reward high quantities of standardized inputs and outputs: teams, technology, texts, claims of access. Against this background, slow research can help us produce accounts that are more informative, thoughtful, and imaginative about transnational policy processes.

References:

- Bourdieu, P. (1996) [1989] *The state nobility: elite schools in the field of power*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Kuus, M. (2014) *Geopolitics and expertise: knowledge and authority in European diplomacy*. London, Wiley.
- Kuus, M. (2013) Foreign policy and ethnography: A sceptical intervention. *Geopolitics* 18.1, 115-31.
- McCann E. and Ward, K. (2012) Assembling urbanism: following policies and 'studying through' the sites and situations of policy making. *Environment and Planning A* 44, 42-51.
- Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2012) Follow the policy: a distended case approach. *Environment and Planning A* 44, 21-30.
- Roy, A. (2012) Ethnographic circulations: space-time relations in the worlds of poverty management. *Environment and Planning A* 44, 31-41.
- Sayer, A. R. (1992) *Method in social science: a realist approach*. (2nd edition) London, Routledge.
- Shore, C. (2006) The limits of ethnography versus the poverty of theory: patron-client Relations in Europe re-visited. *SITES: New Series* 3.2, 40-59.

Enriching urban policy mobilities research

Cristina Temenos and Tom Baker

Compared to literatures on policy learning, transfer and diffusion, which have had long-standing interests in the circulation of urban policy (Clarke, 2012), ‘policy mobilities’ research is a relative newcomer to the field. In such a context, this contribution to *Debates and Developments* has identified theoretical and methodological issues in need of careful consideration as policy mobilities inquiry matures. To conclude, we draw together some key insights from the authors and offer our own modest contribution to this debate. In particular, we focus on the need for greater appreciation of embeddedness, both in historical and intellectual terms, as well as the need to further refine our conceptual and spatial vocabularies.

Given the generally unsophisticated understandings of spatiality in literatures concerned with urban policy transfer, policy mobilities research has rightly focused attention on theorizing and analysing spatial dynamics. As a corollary, however, research to date has tended to downplay the historical embeddedness of policy and policy-making. Jacobs and Lees (2013), for instance, have recently called for a ‘thickening’ of research in this area, while a number of other interventions have commented on the need to appreciate historical engagements and legacies (cf. Clarke, 2012; Temenos & McCann, 2012; Cook *et al.*, 2014). As both Kuus and Cook’s commentaries remind us, urban policy mobilities research is only beginning to forge its identity among other established disciplinary traditions. Indeed, scholars of policy studies—broadly—and policy mobilities—in particular—would benefit from continued engagement with other disciplines. Harris and Moore’s (2013) special issue on planning and policy mobilities, as well as Quark’s (2013) detailed analysis of the cotton standards war in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, exhibit the breadth and depth of these possibilities (see also Bunnell, 2013; Cohen, forthcoming; Shore *et al.* 2011; Söderström & Geertman, 2013). This recent volley of work illustrates richly detailed engagement with other disciplines, and attends to the critiques frequently leveled at policy mobilities approaches. The speed of publishing research, as we know, is not commensurate with the speed of knowledge economies. And we are reminded that the in-depth, qualitative style of research favoured by policy mobilities scholars, as Merje Kuus’ work points out, also takes *time*. We can reasonably expect that empirical and conceptual weight and wealth will follow as this identity thickens and evolves.

While historical legacies need to be taken seriously for their influence on the policy-making process, researchers must also account for their own historical-intellectual inheritances. McCann and Ward address this by attending to the inherent relationality of dualisms; emphasizing the need to be self-reflexive in our research practice. We argue that policy mobilities research, while having cast a wide empirical net, needs to broaden its critical gaze beyond the cast of policy actors doing the apparent work of mobilizing and territorializing policy ideas. For example, researchers need to be asking conceptually wide research questions that encompass their own positionality,

and the generative effects associated with their research processes and outputs. To make room for ongoing reflexivity, policy mobilities researchers should be asking questions like: What role do institutions, such as universities, play in the transfer of policy ideas and in promoting best practice models? How is our own work implicated in the mobility and immobility of certain policy ideas? How do researchers' engagements with elected officials, policy practitioners, activists and the like see them embroiled in the very process under investigation? In doing so, mobilities scholars strengthen conceptual insights into the broader field of policy studies and in the process can establish a stronger understanding of embodied knowledge and institutional geographies inherent in the mobility of specific policy elements.

Any attempt to respond to historical and intellectual inheritances leads to wider methodological and conceptual considerations. Kuus, for instance, argues that the logics, capital, and processes influencing policy production are best understood through 'slow' research, centring on deep and sustained qualitative engagement. In the dynamic spaces of policy-making, characterised by what Peck (2005: 767) calls "fast-policy regimes", research necessarily needs to be 'slow' in order to understand prevailing modes of production and legitimation. Jacobs & Lees (2013), for example, use detailed interviews, walk-alongs, and textual analysis to study a particular policy *idea*, 'defensible space', at various times and in particular places to account for its eventual widespread usage. Policies ideas in this sense are never created anew, rather they emerge from, and are lent legitimacy by, pre-existing production modes and attendant assemblages of actors, processes and technologies. As Prince (2012) points out, spatialized social formations are central to the constitution of what counts as legitimate and appropriate policy knowledge. To better understand the constitutive role that grounded places and sites play in the process of policy mobilization, policy mobilities researchers need then to attend to both the spatiality of policy elements, and the power-laden social processes that produce them.

The imbrication of different places and sites points, finally, to the continuing need to refine the spatial vocabularies brought to bear on policy mobilities research. Jennifer Robinson highlights the need for new spatial vocabularies in order to grasp the complex landscape that policy mobilities research is concerned with. Most work on urban policy mobilities has, for good reason, focused on the spatialities of mobilization processes. Further attention should be paid to how policy is localized and, as Robinson suggests, to the ways mobile policy knowledge is already local. By focusing on how policies are 'arrived at' in particular places, scholars will be better able to understand the grounded and messy ways that certain policies, or policy elements - strategies, practices, techniques - travel between distinct policy fields. Looking at policy mobilization within a city government, for example, rather than across governments also raises questions around the scale of mobility. In which instances is a policy considered mobile? Is it when parts of policies are borrowed from another city or from another country? What about when policy elements are borrowed from within another department in the same organisation or governance context?

These questions are interesting and important ones for policy mobilities researchers. Yet we would also argue that for researchers of policy mobilities, it is equally crucial to simultaneously ask the question: at what point is mobility fetishized? In this respect, a peopling of urban policy mobilities research is needed. In some cases, as with Jacobs and Lees (2013), it is a focus on one person, in other cases, focused more broadly on the policy actors whose daily decisions are little by little directing the pathways through which policy is developed and implemented (Nielsen, 2011). Something as seemingly banal as which design blogs or Twitter accounts an urban planner follows could have profound diffusive effects on how policies travel. The embodiment of policy elements, tied to people, tied to places, and tied to the geographic imaginaries of which these elements are made up, then becomes an important new direction for studying place-making. We suggest, then, that there is much to be gained by interrogating the role of policy change in the ongoing reconstitution of urban spaces. As a contribution containing multiple perspectives, this *Debates and Developments* intervention into the urban policy mobilities literature was curated to stimulate and provoke, rather than corral and legislate. This was reflected in the commentaries, which demonstrate a conceptual and methodological disposition to openness, a willingness to experiment, and a commitment to critical reflection.

References

- Bunnell, T. (2013) Antecedent cities and inter-referencing effects: learning from and extending beyond critiques of neoliberalisation. *Urban Studies*.
- Clarke, N. (2011) Urban policy mobility, anti-politics, and histories of the transnational municipal movement. *Progress in Human Geography* 35.4, 1-19.
- Cohen, D. (forthcoming) Grounding mobile policies: ad hoc networks and the creative city in Bandung, Indonesia. *The Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*.
- Cook, I. R., Ward, S. V. and Ward, K. (2014) A springtime journey to the Soviet Union: Post-War planning and policy mobilities through the Iron Curtain. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (early online).
- Harris, A. J. and Moore, S. M. (2013) Planning histories and practices of circulating urban knowledge. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.5, 1499-1509.
- Jacobs, J. and Lees, L. (2013) Defensible space on the move: revisiting the urban geography of Alice Coleman. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.5, 1559-1583.
- Nielsen, G. (2011) Peopling policy: on conflicting subjectivities of fee-paying students. In Shore C., Wright S. and Pero, D. (Eds.), *Policy worlds: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power*. Berghahn, New York.
- Peck, J. (2005) Struggling with the creative class. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29.4, 740-770.
- Prince, R. (2012) Policy transfer, consultants and the geographies of governance. *Progress in Human Geography* 36.2, 188-203.
- Quark, A. A. (2013) Institutional mobility and mutation in the global capitalist

- system: a neo-Polanyian analysis of a transnational cotton standards war, 1870–1945. *Environment and Planning A* 45.7, 1588-1604.
- Shore C., Wright S. and Pero D. (2011) *Policy worlds: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power*. Berghahn: New York.
- Söderström, O. and Geertman, S. (2013) Loose threads: The translocal making of public space policy in Hanoi. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 34.2, 244-260.
- Temenos, C. and McCann, E. (2012) The local politics of policy mobility: the education of attention in developing a municipal sustainability fix. *Environment and Planning A* 44, 1389-1406.